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REMARKS ON *LANIUS ROBUSTUS* (Baird), BASED UPON AN EXAMINATION OF THE TYPE SPECIMEN.

BY LEONHARD STEJNEGER.

In April, 1843, there was referred to the Academy, for publication, a paper by Dr. William Gambel, entitled "Descriptions of some New and Rare Birds of the Rocky Mountains and California," where he had been traveling at the instance of Mr. Nuttall. The Committee on Publication, of which Mr. Cassin was a member, recommended it, and consequently it was printed in the Proceedings of that year (vol. i, pp. 259-262).

We make at once the remark, that the Academy at that time had not received specimens, as will appear from the note on page 258. On the contrary, the transfer of Gambel's collection was not made before 1847 (*cf.* Proc. Phila. Acad., iii, p. 346). During that very year several large collections were also received and arranged for exhibition by Cassin and Gambel, viz.: the Rivoli collection, Boucier's collection, Wilson's collection, Cassin's collection of West African birds, altogether nearly 18,500 specimens!

The history of the specimen of *Lanius*, which afterwards became the type of Cassin's *elegans* and Baird's *robustus* cannot (from the catalogues and records of the Academy, as I am kindly informed by Prof. A. Heilprin) be traced further back than 1857, when it was described by Cassin in the Proceedings as *L. elegans*.

It will be remarked, however, that Gambel already, in his paper mentioned above, enumerates *L. elegans* as a bird observed by him in California. But it is evident that he does not refer to any particular specimen, and that the birds referred to *elegans* were nothing but *L. excubitorides*. He says: "This species, of which but a single specimen is known to ornithologists [*viz.*, the type in the British Museum], I found abundant in California . . . . in the adults the breast is pure white; in the young blended with dark brown, like our common species, except the throat and vent, which are white." In his later, more elaborate paper, published in the same year as his collection was turned over to the Academy, Gambel realizes the fact, and simply calls the species met by him *L. ludovicianus* with which he identifies *excubitorides* (Proc.

Phila. Acad., iii, 1846-47, p. 200). Nor is mention made in this paper of any particular specimen.

In his special report upon the increase of the ornithological collection during 1847, Cassin, while mentioning the incorporations of the collection made by Gambel in California, enumerates *Lanius elegans* as among the species "especially interesting," but no allusion to any specimen is made.

It is not before ten years later that we encounter a description and special notice referable to the specimen in question, when Cassin in his "Notes on the North American species of *Archibuteo* and *Lanius*" (Proc. Phila. Acad., ix, 1857,<sup>1</sup> p. 213), gives the characters of *Lanius elegans* Swainson, which evidently are taken from the bird now before me. Regarding the distribution of this species, he says: "This appears to be exclusively a western and northern species, the only specimens of which that we have ever seen are in the Museum of the Philadelphia Academy. Our specimen was brought from California by Dr. Gambel." It will be noted that he speaks of several specimens in the Academy's Museum.

Prof. Baird, in the "Birds of North America," page 327, simultaneously describes the same specimen under the heading of *Collyrio excubitoroides*. He refers to it as "Collected in California by Dr. Gambel," and remarks: "This bird has been referred to *L. elegans* of Swainson, but seems to differ in some appreciable points."

The specimen was figured on plate lxxv.

A more detailed description of the specimen is given by the same author in his "Review of American Birds," page 444 (1866), but he seems to have become doubtful as to the origin of the specimen, since the locality is given as "California?" and in the text he says that it is "labeled as having been collected in California by Dr. Gambel." Though "by no means satisfied that the bird is the true *Lanius elegans* of Swainson," the author introduces it under the heading *Collurio elegans*. It may be remarked that no mention is made of other specimens.

Next we find the specimen mentioned in Cooper's "Ornithology of California," edited by Prof. Baird. On page 140 is

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<sup>1</sup> Published in 1858; the paper was recommended for publication at the meeting, Dec. 29, 1857, cf. p. 210.

given a woodcut representing the head and one of the secondaries. Of the locality is said: "*Hab.*—Of original specimen, uncertain, but somewhere in western North America."

In Dr. Coues' "Key" (1872), for the first time is seriously doubted the North American origin of the specimen. He says (page 125): "To this species [*C. ludovicianus*] I must also refer the *C. elegans* of Baird, considering that the single specimen upon which it was based represents an individual peculiarity in the size of the bill. This specimen is supposed to be from California, but some of Dr. Gambel's, to which the same locality is assigned, were certainly procured elsewhere, and it may not be a North American bird at all."

The "History of North American Birds," by Baird, Brewer and Ridgway, contains little additional information, except that the bird here is made the type of the new name *Collurio ludovicianus*, var. *robustus*, since it had been shown by Sharpe and Dresser that the type of *L. elegans* Sw. was referable to some Old World species, erroneously said to have come from the "Fur-countries." The authors also assert that they "have no reason to discredit the alleged locality of the specimen."

Not being able to reconcile the statement of Prof. Baird, that the specimen in question "is very decidedly different from any of the recognized North American species," with the reduction of it to a variety under *ludovicianus*, I, in 1878, named the bird *Lanius bairdi* (Arch. Math. Naturv., iii, p. 330), a synonym which, together with many others, Dr. Gadow has seen fit to entirely ignore in the eighth volume of the "Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum" (1883).

Finally, we have to mention the position taken by Dr. Coues, who, in his "Birds of the Colorado Valley" (p. 546) "under the circumstances, declines to take further notice of the supposed species in the present work." "The circumstances" alluded to seem to be the doubt as to the correctness of the locality attributed to Gambel's specimen, as expressed already in his "Key." We are compelled, however, to take exception to a statement contained in the sentence commencing his account, though, as will be found later on, we agree with him as to the result. He says: "But Dr. Gambel, in 1843 (Proc. Phila. Acad., 1843, 261), described a shrike, *supposed to be* from 'California,' which he identified with Swainson's bird, and called *L. elegans*." The fact is, however, that the species which Gambel, in 1843,

described *L. c.*, not only was supposed to be, but also really was, from "California," being *excubitorides*, collected there by himself, and the statement should correctly read thus: "But Cassin and Baird, in 1858, described a shrike, *supposed to be* from 'California,'" etc.


The latest account of the bird is found in the eighth volume of the "Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum" (1883), p. 243, by Dr. Gadow, solely based on Baird, Brewer, and Ridgway's work. The name is given as *Lanius robustus*, and the habitat, California, is not questioned.

This finishes the literary history of the specimen, which may be tabulated thus:—

1858. *Lanius elegans* Cassin, Pr. Phila. Acad., ix, 1857, p. 213 (nec Swains., 1831).  
 1858. *Collyrio excubitoroides* Baird, B. North Am., p. 327 (part).  
 1858. *Collyrio elegans* Baird, B. North Am., pl. lxxv, fig. 1.  
 1866. *Collurio elegans* Baird, Rev. Am. B., p. 444; Baird and Cooper, Orn. Californ., i, p. 140 (1870).  
 1872. *Collurio ludovicianus* Coues, Key, p. 125.  
 1873. *Collurio ludovicianus* var. *robustus* Baird, Am. Natural., vii, 1873 (p. 608); B., Br. and Ridgw., Hist. N. Am. B., i, p. 420 (1874).  
 1878. ——— Coues, B. Color. Vall., i, p. 545.  
 1878. *Lanius bairdi* Stejneger, Archiv Math. Naturv., iii, 1878, pp. 326, 330; *Id.*, *ibid.*, iv, 1879, p. 263.  
 1880. *Lanius ludovicianus robustus* Ridgw., Pr. U. S. Nat. Mus., 1880, p. 175; *Id.*, Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus., No. 21, p. 20 (1881).  
 1883. *Lanius robustus* Gadow, Cat. B. Brit. Mus., viii, p. 243.

We shall now examine the specimen itself, which, by the courtesy of the authorities of the Academy, I have before me.

It is mounted and in a state of preservation which, though not very good, still makes it sufficient for all practical purposes. No label is attached to it, but on the underside of the stand is written in Cassin's handwriting:—

Dr. Gambel  
*Lanius elegans*  
 Sw. Faun. Bor. Am.  
 p. 122  
 Observe larger bill  
 J. C.

No number or reference to a catalogue is found anywhere, nor does the Academy seem to possess any special record of the specimen. The inscription is in ink, except the name, which is written with a lead-pencil.

It will be seen that the locality is not inscribed on the stand, and that now, at least, the specimen is not "labeled as having been collected in California."

The U. S. National Museum possesses a very rich collection of North American Shrikes, and the Old World forms are also tolerably well represented, partly due to the incorporation of my own collection of Shrikes, of which formerly I made a specialty. I have compared the type of *L. robustus* with these, the result being as follows:—

The statement of Professor Baird, that it is "very decidedly different from any of the recognized North American species," is eminently confirmed. The material in the Museum has been doubled many times during the twenty years since he wrote the above, but still the type remains unique in its peculiar characters. I need not repeat here his excellent description, but think it proper to sum up the most diagnostic features of the bird, mainly to counteract any erroneous impression that might arise, caused by the quotation above from Dr. Coues' "Key," in which it is asserted "that the single specimen represents an individual peculiarity in the size of the bill." *Lanius robustus* is not only remarkable for its large bill, but also for its general dark color, total absence of light superciliary stripe, the ashy wash of the lower parts, the gray loreal spot, the restriction of the white on the tail-feathers, particularly at the base, and the peculiar distribution of black and white on the secondaries, so well illustrated by the figure in Cooper and Baird's Californian Ornithology quoted above.

Of all the Old World members of the restricted subgenus *Lanius*, the present bird only needs comparison with a few dark-colored species. In many respects it resembles *L. algeriensis* Less., particularly in the shade of the gray on the back, the absence of a white superciliary stripe, the ashy under surface; but the wing speculum is much larger, the secondaries differently colored, and the tail with less white, not to speak of the difference in the size of the bill. In the latter respect our bird agrees rather closely with a specimen of a *Lanius* collected by H. B. Tristram at Gennesareth, March, 9, 1864, but it is darker both above and beneath, and the pattern of secondaries and tail is different. This specimen from Palestine seems referable to the form which Gadow says is "intermediate between *L. fallax* and

*L. uncinatus*," the latter being a big-billed island form from Socotra, off the coast of Eastern Africa, and, judging from his remarks (Cat. B. Brit. Mus., viii, p. 248) some of the specimens from that region east of the Mediterranean may be even more like the type of *robustus*. The conclusion of my comparison is that the latter is more closely allied to some of the forms inhabiting the regions south and east of the Mediterranean, than to any of the known Nearctic species, but that it is entirely distinct from any other species known.

We shall now shortly review the evidence bearing upon the origin of the type: 1. Gambel himself nowhere directly and particularly refers to the specimen in question; 2. His collection was turned over to the Academy four years after his original paper was published; 3. During the same year the Academy received more than 18,000 specimens, a great many of which were from the Old World; 4. Not before ten years after is any direct allusion made to the specimen by Cassin; 5. No indication of it having been collected in California, can now be found attached to the bird or the stand; 6. We have Dr. Coues' testimony that "some specimens of Dr. Gambel's, to which the same locality (California) is assigned, were certainly procured elsewhere"; 7. So far as the evidence goes, the bird is nearer related to some Old World forms than to those from North America. The sum of all this would indicate that the specimen in all probability is not North American, and enough reasons are given to explain how the mistake may have easily originated. It would not be human, if in receiving and putting on exhibition more than 18,000 specimens in one year some such mistakes did not happen. I therefore think we would be fully justified in excluding *Lanius robustus* from the list of North American birds.

But it should always be borne in mind, that notwithstanding the apparent conclusiveness of the above remarks, the question is not fully solved before we have pointed out where the species really occurs, since there is a bare possibility that some day it may be discovered not far from its alleged habitat in spite of all our arguments. *L. robustus* is very distinct from the other American Shrikes, but not so much so, that its eventual discovery in any part of the Nearctic region would cause a great surprise as far as this point is concerned. The large bill and the dark color suggest some southern island, and explorers of islands off our southwest coast should be on the look-out.